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ABSTRACT

A self-instructional program in German for undergraduate students of engineering at Trinity College, Dublin, was developed based on a questionnaire of student needs, language experience, and preferred instructional methods. The course design and instructional materials for the program emphasized oral/aural skills; moreover, counseling and academic advising were provided. Small-group interviews were conducted both at the beginning of and during the instructional program to assess student needs and attitudes about their instruction. Academic assessment was provided at two levels, beginning and intermediate, at the students' option, and consisted of oral and written components. Nine students completed the first program cycle and performed adequately or better on the final test. The independent study aspect of the program was found to respond adequately to the individual needs, levels, and learning styles of the students. It was also found that the counseling structure should cover a wide range of therapeutic and pedagogic functions, even in a very small group, but that some students function and achieve well with little or no support. (MSE)

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Centre for Language and Communication Studies

Learning German without a teacher

Report on a self-instructional programme for undergraduate students of Engineering Science at Trinity College Dublin, 1982–84

D. G. Little and A. J. Grant

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CLCS Occasional Paper No.14

Spring 1986

LEARNING GERMAN WITHOUT A TEACHER:

REPORT ON A SELF-INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMME FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF ENGINEERING SCIENCE AT TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN 1982-84*

by

D. G. LITTLE and A. J. GRANT

1 AIMS, DESIGN AND ORGANIZATION OF THE PROGRAMME

1.1 Background

The self-instructional programme in German for students of Engineering Science which is the focus of this report was devised and piloted as part of a larger research project in self-instructional language learning initiated by the Centre for Language and Communication Studies (CLCS) in 1980.

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* An earlier and briefer version of this report was presented at the IRAAL-BAAL seminar "Language learning in formal and informal contexts", held at Trinity College Dublin, 11-13 September 1984 (Little and Grant 1984).

The first phase of the project used a questionnaire to gather information on students' previous experience of language learning, the teaching methods and learning materials they had been exposed to, their attitude to the learning task, and the foreign language needs they were likely to want to meet (Little et al. 1984).

The second phase of the project was based on two findings that emerged from an early analysis of the questionnaire data: (i) that it was desirable to supplement available self-instructional learning materials with various kinds of *realia* and (ii) that a significant minority of our respondents had a positive attitude towards improving their knowledge of Irish. *Realia* were collected for the languages of highest demand (the continental European languages of the Irish second and third level curricula, especially French and German), and a means of arranging them was devised which relates them to conventional learning materials. As regards the minority interest in Irish, our questionnaire data on such matters as previous learning experience, the methods and materials respondents had been exposed to, the reasons they gave for wanting to improve their competence in Irish, and the situations and circumstances in which they envisaged using the language provided the basis for a multi-dimensional syllabus (Little et al. 1985), which was drawn up following such models as van Ek's *Threshold Level* (1975) and the *Skeleton Syllabus* of Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann's Modern Languages Project (Little et al. 1980).

Our questionnaire data on preferred approaches to language learning indicated that many potential learners would resist a self-instructional approach that was wholly independent of class and teacher. Accordingly the third and final phase of our re-

search project was devoted to developing a counselling structure to support self-instructional learners.

Our need for learners to participate in this final phase of our research project coincided with a desire on the part of the Faculty of Engineering and Systems Sciences to introduce a course in German for their students. For some years the Faculty had provided a two-year course in French leading to a certificate of proficiency. The course was (and is) taught and examined on conventional lines. CLCS offered to provide a programme in German on condition that it could be self-instructional and experimental, learners using the language laboratory at the times most suitable to them. The offer was accepted. In October 1982 Aedamar Grant was appointed research assistant with special responsibility for the German programme, which was devised and organized by her in consultation with David Little.

1.2 Aims of the programme

Our questionnaire data suggested that although some of our learners might already know some German, few of them were likely to have been taught with a strong bias towards using the language as a medium of everyday communication. At the same time we knew from informal contacts with students that many of them sought vacation jobs and placements in Germany and were thus likely to give a high priority to developing oral/aural skills in German. Moreover, since some at least of our learners would be beginners, it seemed inappropriate to give the programme an exclusively "language for special purposes" focus from the outset. These considerations helped to determine our choice of the *BBC German Kit*

(Sprankling 1979) as the core learning resource for the programme. The *Kit* recommended itself for three reasons:

(i) it is specifically designed for self-instruction and provides learners with the means of regular self-evaluation;

(ii) based on the authentic recordings made for the successful BBC German course *Kontakte*, it contains a wealth of linguistic and non-linguistic information of the kind needed by a foreigner living in Germany;

(iii) it makes extensive use of audio recordings, which means that it is well suited to use in a language laboratory.

In addition to the *BBC German Kit* we were able to offer learners a wide range of supplementary learning materials. We hoped that as they progressed through the *Kit*, whether as beginners or in order to give a communicative edge to the German they already knew, they would reach a clearer understanding of the personal need they were fulfilling by learning German and would thus achieve autonomy. It was fundamental to the programme that it should permit a high degree of individualization as learners developed their own interests, some of which might be related to their academic or vocational concerns.

1.3 Counselling

We intended that the counselling service should provide learners with both therapeutic and pedagogic support. Learning a second/foreign language self-instructionally is likely to prove difficult for many learners: past experience of

language learning may impede their present efforts, they may have difficulty in organizing an appropriate routine for learning, and the slightest loss of motivation may result in a disastrous loss of interest in the whole learning enterprise.

We conceived the counsellor's therapeutic task as being to bring the learner to a clearer (even a new) understanding of his problems and to help him decide on appropriate solutions to them. From the outset we adopted Harding and Tealby's view that counselling for language learning should be "a dynamic process leading to changes (linguistic, behavioural, cognitive, attitudinal) in two individuals" (1981a, p.29). Clearly, the realization of such a process would depend crucially on the establishment of an empathetic relationship between counsellor and learner in which the roles of expert and non-expert were not excessively intrusive.

At the same time, however, the counsellor must be prepared to act as expert in advising the learner, and especially in providing learning materials appropriate to the learner's increasingly individual needs. It was axiomatic that counselling would be provided only when requested.

Besides her function in relation to individual learners, the counsellor had a function in relation to the learners as a group; this emerged especially in the organization of meetings with native speakers of German, which became an integral part of the programme. A fuller account of our approach to counselling, together with three case studies, is contained in the third section of this report.

1.4 Organization of the programme

In the organization of the programme we anticipated no conflict between the interests of researchers and learners, which were both likely to be served by systematic record-keeping. This report focusses chiefly on the learners who participated in the programme in 1982-4 (Group A), and especially on the sub-group of nine learners who followed the programme from beginning to end and submitted themselves for assessment in Trinity term 1984 (Group Ai). For purposes of broad comparison we include in the second part of the report some data on learners entering the programme in 1983 (Group B). The programme was organized in the same way for both Group A and Group B.

At the beginning of Michaelmas term 1982 and Michaelmas term 1983 a notice was posted in the School of Engineering inviting all second-year students who were interested in learning German by self-instruction to attend a general introductory meeting. The notice made clear that it was not necessary to have a previous knowledge of German in order to take part in the scheme and explained that CLCS would provide learning materials together with a counselling service for those learners who wished to discuss their learning needs and problems. At the introductory meeting we

- provided a general introduction to the scheme by outlining what participants would be involving themselves in, describing the range of learning materials available, and explaining what the counselling service was intended to achieve in terms of (i) helping learners and (ii) research;

- emphasized the advantages of self-

instructional language learning as regards (i) fulfilling the learner's individual needs and (ii) not tying him to a fixed pattern of study;

- took students through the instructions for use printed at the beginning of the *BBC German Kit* and then through a sample unit, emphasizing that they were free to develop their own system for working through units;

- discussed practical aspects of working with the *BBC German Kit*, such as the desirability of regular learning, the pace at which students should attempt to cover the course, the need for note-taking and for regular consideration of their learning objectives and evaluation of their progress;

- gave general guidelines on how long we thought it would take a student to work through all 25 units of the *BBC German Kit*, while emphasizing that it was important for each individual to find the pace of learning best suited to himself;

- established when, in terms of their lecture timetable, students would be free to use the language laboratory and the counselling service;

- arranged an initial interview with all students interested in participating in the programme.

Because of the numbers involved, initial interviews were for the most part conducted with groups of three students. This turned out to be a highly successful arrangement. Students were interested in hearing each others' opinions and

seemed to speak more openly about their past language learning experience when other students were present. Moreover, group interviews assisted overseas students, who seemed less inhibited about seeking clarification of those things they had not understood when they were in groups than when they were interviewed individually, and who helped one another to formulate answers to the counsellor's questions. In these first interviews the counsellor reminded students of the most important points made at the introductory meeting, including all details of practical arrangements; then students were asked if they had any questions or problems that they wanted to discuss; next they were asked specific questions about their language background, language learning experience, etc.; and finally they were shown the language laboratory and the library of learning resources.

At the beginning of Hilary term 1983 and Hilary term 1984 all students who had attended the first interview were invited to attend a second interview in order to give us their views about the programme and to enable us to determine the extent to which one term of learning had changed their attitudes and objectives.

After the first interview it was up to each student to use the counselling service and the available learning resources in the language laboratory as seemed most appropriate to him. The language laboratory was open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays to Fridays throughout the year, and students could make an appointment to see the counsellor by signing a list kept with the learning materials. A record was kept of all visits to the language laboratory by students participating in the programme and detailed notes were made after each counselling session. The second part of this report provides information

about rates of participation and summarizes the data collected at the first and second interviews.

From the beginning it was intended to award a certificate of proficiency to students who successfully completed the programme. It was clear that the promise of certification was an important motivating factor for many participants, and that it would help to give shape as well as purpose to their learning activities. However, we decided to take no decisions about the form and content of assessment until we had some experience of learners, their interests and their progress. These decisions were taken in outline at the beginning of the second year of the programme (Michaelmas term 1983) after a consultative meeting with continuing participants. An account of the assessment procedures adopted is given in the fourth part of the report.

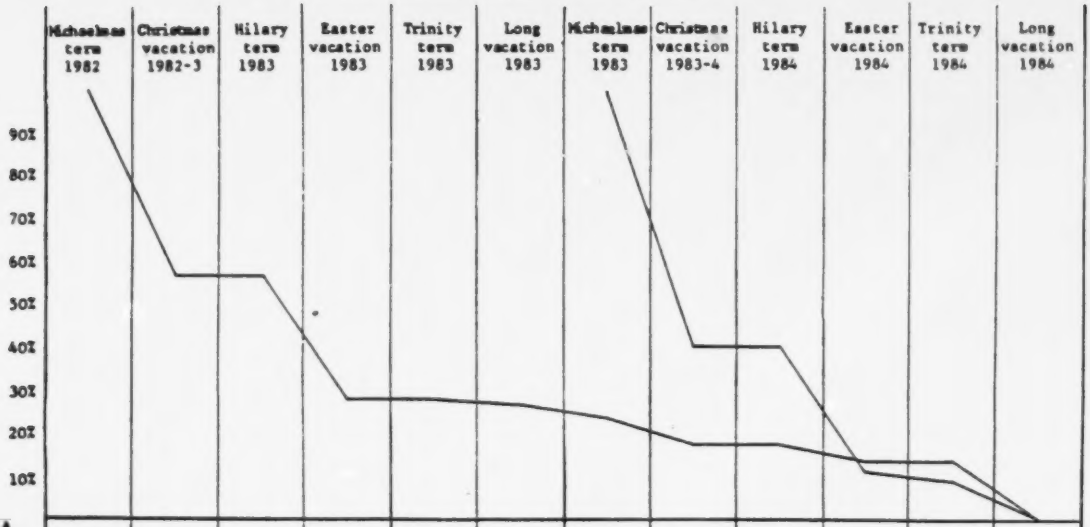
2 RATES OF PARTICIPATION AND LEARNER PROFILES

2.1 Rates of participation

Table 1 shows the rates of participation in the programme for Groups A and B. In either case the base figure is the total number of students who attended the first interview and/or made use of the learning materials provided. Each year of the programme is divided into six periods, three terms and three vacations. In order to count as a participant for any period a student had to make use of the learning materials and/or the counselling service on at least one occasion in that period. In general the participation rates show a predictable downward trend, with a sharp decline early in the programme. The graph for Group A shows how quickly Group Ai began to emerge, while the graph for Group B predicts that Group Bi would be smaller than Group Ai. In the event only two members of Group B completed the two-year programme.

Table 2 shows the average number of language laboratory visits per participant per week for Groups A and Ai in each term and vacation of the programme. As one would expect, the figures for Group Ai are consistently higher than those for Group A. However, it is important to note the scale involved here: in only two periods of the programme does Group Ai approach an average of one language laboratory visit per participant per week. Similarly, Table 3 shows the average number of counselling visits per participant per week for Groups A and Ai in each term and vacation of the programme. Again there is a predictable difference between the two groups, but again it is important to note the scale involved. In the first two periods of the programme, counselling

TABLE 1 Rates of participation by Group A (N = 63) and Group B (N = 43) in each term and vacation of the programme



	Michaelmas term 1982	Christmas vacation 1982-3	Hilary term 1983	Easter vacation 1983	Trinity term 1983	Long vacation 1983	Michaelmas term 1983	Christmas vacation 1983-4	Hilary term 1984	Easter vacation 1984	Trinity term 1984	Long vacation 1984
GROUP A numbers participating	63	36	36	18	18	17	15	11	11	9	9	0
GROUP A % participating	100%	57·1%	57·1%	28·6%	28·6%	27%	23·8%	17·4%	17·4%	14·2%	14·2%	0
GROUP B numbers participating	/	/	/	/	/	/	43	19	19	5	4	0
GROUP B % participating	/	/	/	/	/	/	100%	41·2%	41·2%	11·9%	9·3%	0

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TABLE 2 Groups A (N = 63) and Ai (N = 9) compared in terms of the average number of language laboratory visits per participant per week for each term and vacation in the programme

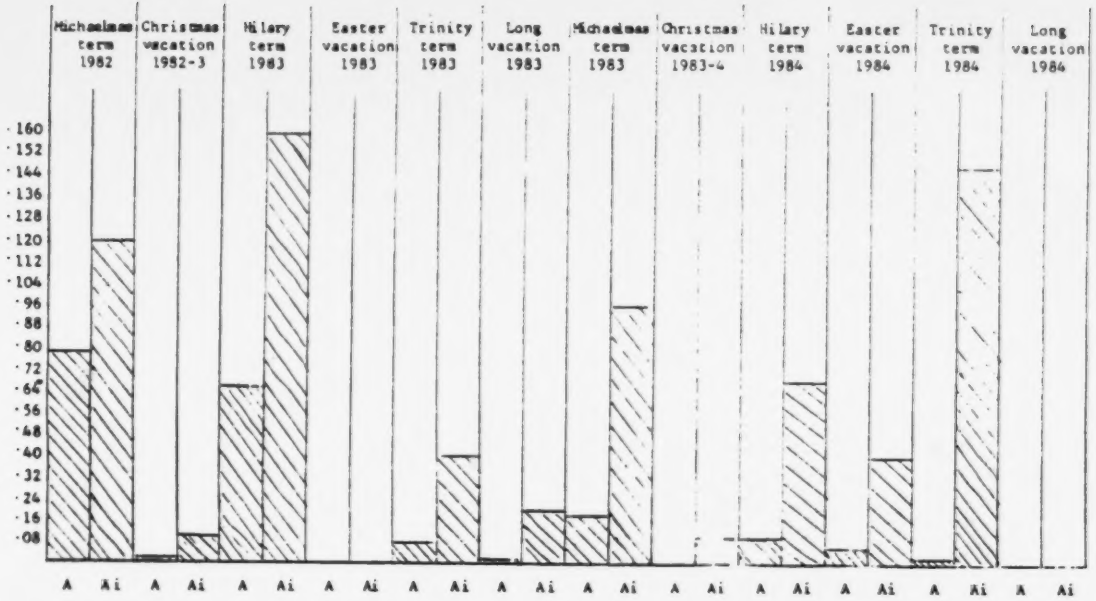

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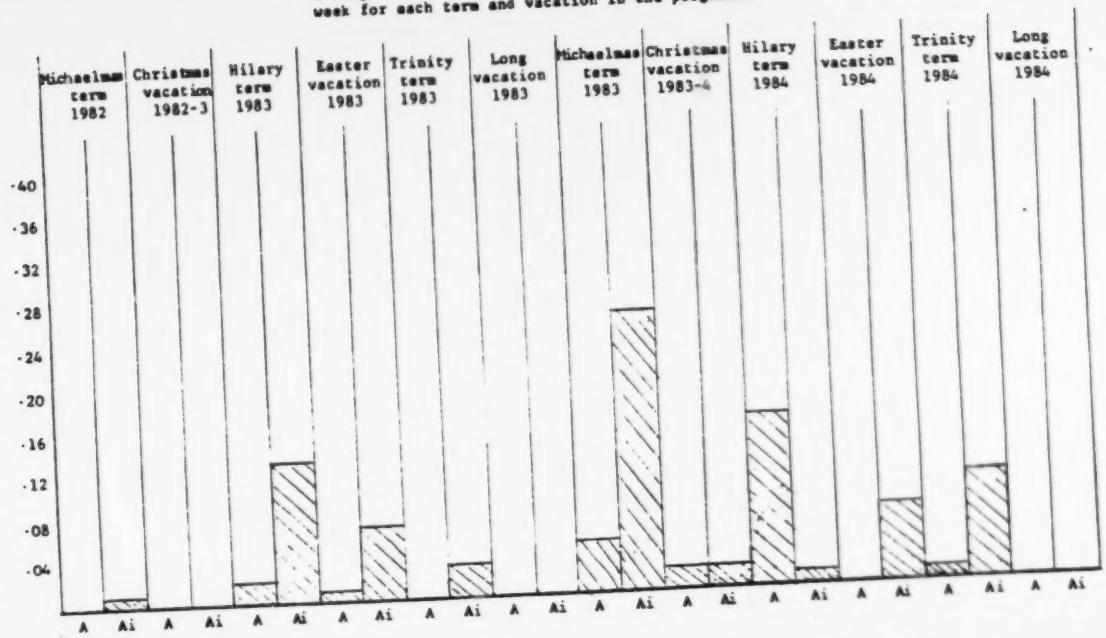
TABLE 3 Groups A (N = 63) and Ai (N = 9) compared in terms of the average number of counselling visits per participant per week for each term and vacation in the programme



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scarcely figured at all in the learning process of either group. At the second interview (held early in the third period of the programme, Hilary term 1983) it became clear that participants tended to view the counselling service as a last resort, to be used only when the learner was on the point of giving up. The second interview gave the counsellor an opportunity to explain the nature of the service and the sort of practical help it could provide, after which participants began to come for counselling. It is from this point on that a difference emerges between Groups A and Ai as regards the use they made of the counselling service. The difference is particularly marked during the second year of the programme, by which time members of Group Ai were beginning to shape their learning to the requirements of the terminal assessment.

2.2 Profiles of learner groups emerging from the first interview

In Michaelmas term 1982 49 students in Group A came for a first interview, and in Michaelmas term 1983 39 students in Group B came for a first interview. As explained in 1.4 above, the interviews were mostly conducted with groups of three students, though the counsellor also saw larger groups and individual students. The function of the first interview was to reinforce the information about the programme that had been given at the introductory meeting and to gather information about the language background and language learning experience of the participants. This information was elicited by means of a simple questionnaire (see Appendix). In the interests of accuracy and consistency the counsellor herself filled in each student's questionnaire. The replies to some questions, especially those

concerning teaching methods and learning materials that students had been exposed to, were arrived at only after discussion. The information elicited at first interview is summarized in the eight tables that follow.

Table 4 shows the percentages of participants in the programme reporting different languages as their mother tongue. As one would expect, English was the mother tongue of the overwhelming majority. Of the five members of Group A whose mother tongue was a language other than English, one never attended the language laboratory or came for counselling; two attended the language laboratory during Michaelmas term 1982 but then withdrew from the programme; one participated until Hilary term 1983; and one participated until Michaelmas term 1983 and also came for counselling in that term. This student had intended to present himself for assessment in Trinity term 1984 but in Hilary term 1984 decided not to do so. His learning pattern is discussed more fully in the next part of the report (Case study A). Of the two members of Group B who reported a language other than English as their mother tongue, one did not participate in the programme after the first interview, while the other attended the language laboratory during Michaelmas term 1983 only. It is perhaps worth noting that all members of Group Ai had English as their mother tongue.

As Table 5 shows, the majority of participants in the programme had learned Irish and French as second languages. Significant percentages of participants also reported that they had learned German. Table 6 shows the levels to which they had taken their learning. A markedly smaller percentage of Group B than of Group A had taken German to Leaving Certificate level, but almost identical percentages had taken German to

TABLE 4 WHAT IS YOUR MOTHER TONGUE?

	Group A (49)	Group Ai (9)	Group B (39)
English	89.7% (44)	100.0% (9)	94.8% (37)
Chinese	4.0% (2)		
Hochchew	2.0% (1)		
Cantonese	2.0% (1)		
Mandarin	2.0% (1)		
Persian			2.5% (1)
Portuguese			2.5% (1)

TABLE 5 WHICH LANGUAGES OTHER THAN YOUR MOTHER TONGUE HAVE YOU LEARNED?

	Group A (49)	Group Ai (9)	Group B (39)
English	10.2% (5)	---	5.1% (2)
Irish	83.7% (41)	88.8% (8)	89.7% (35)
French	81.6% (40)	88.8% (8)	94.9% (37)
German	42.8% (21)	55.5% (5)	38.5% (15)
Italian	2.0% (1)	---	---
Spanish	2.0% (1)	---	7.7% (3)
Latin	26.5% (13)	33.3% (3)	23.0% (9)
Greek	8.2% (4)	---	2.5% (1)
Dutch	---	---	2.5% (1)
Malay	2.0% (1)	---	---
Mandarin	4.0% (2)	---	---
Fukien	2.0% (1)	---	---

TABLE 6 IF YOU ALREADY KNOW SOME GERMAN, TO WHAT LEVEL DID YOU LEARN IT?

	Group A (21)	Group Ai (5)	Group B (15)
Primary school	---	---	6.7% (1)
Intermediate Certificate	23.8% (5)	---	13.3% (2)
O Level G.C.E.	9.5% (2)	---	20.0% (3)
Leaving Certificate	61.9% (13)	80.0% (4)	40.0% (6)
First-year university	---	---	6.7% (1)
Self-instruction	4.8% (1)	20.0% (1)	13.3% (2)

Intermediate Certificate or GCE O Level in the two groups. The one student in Group A who reported that he had previously learned German self-instructionally was also a member of Group Ai. He attended the language laboratory and the counselling service regularly, chose to be assessed optionally on his ability to manipulate technical texts in German, and performed outstandingly well in this optional component as well as in the compulsory component of the assessment. His learning pattern and the use he made of the counselling service is described more fully in the next part of the report (Case study C). Of the two members of Group B who reported that they had previously learned German self-instructionally, one attended the language laboratory regularly in 1983-4; the other attended the language laboratory and came for counselling in Michaelmas term 1983 but did not participate in the programme subsequently.

It is worth noting that the four members of Group Ai who reported that they had taken German at Leaving Certificate, generally did not visit the language laboratory regularly but did use the counselling service as a means of extending their learning beyond the *BBC German Kit*. Three of these four students decided to take optional assessment in reading and understanding semi-technical articles in German. The four beginners in Group Ai attended the language laboratory very regularly throughout the two-year programme; one of them also came for counselling on a regular basis and prepared himself for optional assessment.

As Table 7 shows, school was where the great majority of participants had learned the second languages they knew. Table 8 shows how they remembered the dominant methods by which they had

TABLE 7 WHERE DID YOU LEARN THE SECOND LANGUAGES YOU KNOW?

	Group A (49)		Group Ai (9)		Group B (39)	
School	97.9%	(48)	88.8%	(8)	92.3%	(36)
Self-instruction	2.0%	(1)	11.1%	(1)	5.1%	(2)
Friend	---		---		2.5%	(1)

TABLE 8 BY WHAT METHODS DID YOU LEARN YOUR SECOND LANGUAGES?

	Group A (49)		Group Ai (9)		Group B (39)	
Grammar/translation	87.7%	(43)	88.8%	(8)	82.0%	(32)
Audio-visual	4.1%	(2)	11.1%	(1)	10.2%	(4)
Grammar/translation and audio-visual	8.2%	(4)	---		7.7%	(3)
Written activities	71.4%	(35)	100.0%	(9)	82.0%	(32)
Oral activities	8.2%	(4)	---		10.4%	(4)
Written and oral activities	12.2%	(6)	---		7.7%	(3)
Mechanical exercises	73.4%	(39)	88.8%	(8)	87.2%	(34)
Creative exercises	8.2%	(4)	11.1%	(1)	7.7%	(3)
Mechanical and creative exercises	12.2%	(6)	---		5.1%	(2)

TABLE 9 DID YOU LIKE THE METHODS BY WHICH YOU WERE TAUGHT THE SECOND LANGUAGES YOU KNOW?

	Group A (49)		Group Ai (9)		Group B (39)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Grammar/trans.	---	2.0%	---	11.1%	10.2%	2.5%
Audio-visual	2.0%	---	---	---	15.4%	5.1%
Written activities	4.0%	4.0%	---	---	10.2%	2.5%
Oral activities	59.0%	6.1%	55.5%	11.1%	41.0%	5.1%
Mechanical activities	12.2%	30.6%	22.2%	11.1%	10.2%	51.3%
Creative activities	14.3%	---	11.1%	---	20.5%	---

been taught these languages. The majority had experienced a traditional grammar-translation approach, which helps to explain why written activities had greatly outweighed oral activities and mechanical exercises had greatly outweighed creative exercises in their language learning experience. Table 9 shows the percentages of participants reporting that they had liked or disliked the various language teaching methods they had experienced. All three groups expressed a much greater like than dislike for oral activities, which went some way towards validating our choice of the *BBC German Kit* as the basic learning resource for the programme. Interestingly, whereas Groups A and B reported a greater dislike than like for mechanical exercises, in Group Ai the reverse was the case, though the difference is scarcely significant. Perhaps the most significant thing that emerges from Table 9 is that members of Group Ai expressed very few negative attitudes towards their previous language learning experience.

Table 10 shows the percentages of participants reporting that they had found different approaches to language teaching successful/unsuccessful. A substantial majority of Groups A and Ai but only just over half of Group B believed that mechanical exercises were likely to bring success in language learning. About a third of all participants singled out oral activities as also likely to bring success: fewer in each group than the percentages of participants reporting that they liked oral activities (Table 9).

Table 11 summarizes the aims that participants said they had in undertaking a programme of self-instruction in German. The relative prominence given to communicative purposes and the relative lack of prominence given to technical German further

TABLE 10 DID YOU FIND THESE METHODS SUCCESSFUL?

	Group A (49)		Group Ai (9)		Group B (39)	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Grammar/translation	---	---	---	---	10.2%	2.5%
Audio-visual	2.0%	---	---	---	10.2%	5.1%
Written activities	2.0%	---	---	---	10.2%	---
Oral activities	30.6%	4.0%	33.3%	---	25.6%	---
Mechanical activities	83.7%	8.2%	77.7%	11.1%	51.3%	10.2%
Creative activities	2.0%	---	---	---	---	---

TABLE 11 WHAT IS YOUR PRIMARY AIM IN LEARNING GERMAN?

	Group A (49)		Group Ai (9)		Group B (39)	
For communicative purposes	44.9%	(22)	55.5%	(5)	48.9%	(19)
Technical German	16.3%	(8)	11.1%	(1)	---	
To enhance curriculum vitae	4.0%	(2)	---		---	
To improve skills in German	12.2%	(6)	11.1%	(1)	15.4%	(6)
To enhance career prospects	22.4%	(11)	22.2%	(2)	25.6%	(10)
For the sake of having another language	---		---		10.2%	(4)

validates our choice of the *BBC German Kit* as the basic learning resource for the programme.

2.3 Profile of learner groups emerging from second interviews

Early in Hilary term 1983 and Hilary term 1984 learners who had embarked on the programme the previous term were invited to attend a short informal interview with the counsellor. The purpose of this second interview was

- to hear participants' views on the structure and content of the *BBC German Kit*;
- to find out how participants were coping with self-instructional learning and how much progress they thought they had made;
- to re-establish and clarify the counsellor's role.

In 1983 24 of the 49 students who had attended the first interview also attended the second interview; in 1984 15 of the 39 students who had attended the first interview also attended the second interview. As at the first interview, the information we required was elicited by means of a questionnaire (see Appendix A) which the counsellor filled in for each interviewee. This information is summarized in the nine tables that follow.

Table 12 shows how often participants estimated they had visited the language laboratory. It is important to note that in answering this question they had to rely on memory and many of their answers were somewhat vague. The memory of the majority of participants that they had visited the

TABLE 12 HOW OFTEN DO YOU VISIT THE LANGUAGE LABORATORY?

	Group A (24)	Group Ai (9)	Group B (15)
More than twice weekly	8.3% (2)	11.1% (1)	---
Twice weekly	37.5% (9)	33.3% (3)	26.6% (4)
Once weekly	41.6% (10)	33.3% (3)	60.0% (9)
Less than once weekly	8.3% (2)	11.1% (1)	13.3% (2)
Not at all	4.1% (1)	11.1% (1)	---

TABLE 13 HAVE YOU BEEN DOING ANY PRIVATE STUDY?

	Group A (24)	Group Ai (9)	Group B (15)
Yes	25.0% (6)	22.2% (2)	13.3% (2)
No	75.0% (18)	77.7% (7)	86.6% (13)

TABLE 14 HOW FAR HAVE YOU GOT WITH THE BBC GERMAN KIT?

	Group A (24)	Group Ai (9)	Group B (15)
Units 1-5	45.8% (11)	22.2% (2)	53.3% (8)
Units 6-10	41.6% (10)	55.5% (5)	26.6% (4)
Units 11-15	12.5% (3)	11.1% (1)	6.6% (1)
Units 16-20	---	---	---
Units 21-25	---	---	6.6% (1)
None	---	11.1% (1)	6.6% (1)

lab on average once or twice a week is a generous overestimate, as comparison with Table 2 reveals (2.1 above). It is worth noting that the replies of Group Ai to this question more closely matched our attendance records than those of Groups A and B, which may suggest that members of Group Ai had already developed a realistic and well structured approach to their learning. Also, remembering accurately was less likely to cause them to lose face.

As Table 13 shows, the great majority of participants in all groups reported that they did no private study in addition to their visits to the language laboratory. Those who reported that they had done some private study mentioned activities such as learning vocabulary, reading German, looking at the *Kontakte* materials (the BBC course on which the *German Kit* is based), and consulting German grammars.

The majority of all participants reported that after one term of learning they had progressed to a point somewhere in the first ten units of the *Kit*. It emerged from the interviews that most participants had concentrated on the course book and had not used the *Magazin*. Those members of Groups A and B who reported that they had reached a point somewhere between Units 1 and 5 of the *Kit* were mostly beginners, whereas those who reported that they had reached a point somewhere between Units 6 and 10 mostly had some previous experience of learning German. The one member of Group B who reported that he had reached Unit 23 had taken German at Leaving Certificate. Members of Group Ai had made on average greater progress than members of Groups A and B. However, this is not to be explained in terms of the fact that five members of Group Ai had learned German before: the five learners who reported that they had got to

somewhere between Units 6 and 10 included all four beginners, whose progress appears to reflect the high level of motivation with which they embarked on the programme. By contrast, the two learners in Group Ai who reported that they had got to somewhere between Units 1 and 5 had taken German at Leaving Certificate, as had the one member of the group who reported that he had made no progress at all. The one member of Group Ai who reported that he had reached a point somewhere between Units 11 and 15 was the participant who had learned German previously by self-instruction.

In general participants responded positively to the *BBC German Kit* even when they expressed reservations (Table 15). Aspects of the *Kit* which participants singled out for specific approval were:

- the material presented in the *Kit* was relevant to their immediate learning needs;
- the structure of the *Kit* was easy to work with and allowed the learner enough freedom to develop his own pattern of learning;
- the material in the *Kit* helped the learner to develop communicative skills that would enable him to cope in everyday situations;
- working with authentic recordings in the language laboratory provided the learner with an opportunity to hear German as it is spoken in real life and to respond orally in various communicative situations.

The three members of Group A who found the *Kit* merely satisfactory were also members of Group Ai. They had taken German at Leaving Certificate and felt an early need for materials to supplement the

TABLE 15 WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE BBC GERMAN KIT?

	Group A (24)	Group Ai (9)	Group B (15)
Very good - relevant to needs, useful for communicative purposes	54.1% (13)	44.4% (4)	46.6% (7)
Very good - but found some aspect of KIT difficult	33.3% (8)	11.1% (1)	53.3% (8)
Satisfactory	12.5% (3)	33.3% (3)	---
Unsatisfactory	---	---	---

TABLE 16 AT THIS STAGE, WHAT ARE YOUR CHIEF AIMS IN LEARNING GERMAN?

	Group A (24)	Group Ai (9)	Group B (15)
Communicative purposes	79.1% (19)	66.6% (6)	53.3% (8)
Career goals	8.3% (2)	11.1% (1)	6.6% (1)
To know another language	4.1% (1)	22.2% (2)	26.6% (4)
For curriculum vitae	4.1% (1)	---	---
Technical German	---	---	20.0% (3)

TABLE 17 DO YOU NEED ANY PRACTICAL HELP IN ANY AREA OF THE COURSE?

	Group A (24)	Group Ai (9)	Group B (15)
None	58.3% (14)	44.4% (4)	86.6% (13)
Grammar	16.6% (4)	11.1% (1)	13.3% (2)
Reading material	20.8% (5)	33.3% (3)	---
Native speaker contacts	4.1% (1)	---	---

Kit; they were among the earliest participants to use the counselling service to provide them with pedagogic assistance, and there is some evidence that without the counselling service they would have dropped out of the programme at an early stage.

Table 16 summarizes participants' responses to the question: "At this stage, what are your chief aims in learning German?" These reponses should be compared with those summarized in Table 11 (2.2 above). After a term working with the *BBC German Kit* we find an increase in the percentages of participants reporting communicative purposes as their chief aim in learning the language. This change in group profile, especially marked in the case of Group A, is not wholly to be explained in terms of the drop-out rate since first interviews; a number of participants reported that the *Kit* had made them change their mind as to their chief aim in learning.

Table 17 shows the percentages of participants in each group who expressed a desire for some kind of practical help with their learning. In each group the greatest number of participants said that they needed no help; but in Group Ai there is already some evidence of the emergence of patterns of learning that would come to require regular support from the counsellor.

As Table 18 shows, the great majority of participants in both Group A and Group B were positive or positive with reservations in their evaluation of self-instructional learning. It is interesting that the three members of Group A who at this stage described self-instructional learning as unsatisfactory were also members of Group Ai. They are the same three students who had taken German at Leaving Certificate and found

TABLE 18 HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO SELF-INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGE LEARNING?

	Group A (24)	Group Ai (9)	Group B (15)
Very good: it gives you control over your own learning	70.8% (17)	55.5% (5)	60.0% (9)
Very good, but with some reservation	16.6% (4)	11.1% (1)	33.3% (5)
Unsatisfactory	12.5% (3)	33.3% (3)	---
Prefer traditional approach with teacher	---	---	6.6% (1)

TABLE 19 DID YOU ENCOUNTER ANY PARTICULAR DIFFICULTIES IN THE COURSE OF YOUR LEARNING?

	Group A (24)	Group Ai (9)	Group B (15)
None	25.0% (6)	33.3% (3)	53.3% (8)
Motivation/attitude	29.1% (7)	33.3% (3)	20.0% (3)
Language difficulties	16.6% (4)	11.1% (1)	13.3% (2)
Finding time to learn	25.0% (6)	22.2% (2)	13.3% (2)
Methodology of KIT	4.1% (1)	---	---

TABLE 20 HOW COULD THE COUNSELLING SERVICE BE OF USE TO YOU?

	Group A (24)	Group Ai (9)	Group B (15)
In the future	62.5% (15)	44.4% (4)	13.3% (2)
Help with language	8.3% (2)	11.1% (1)	6.6% (1)
Help with motivation	---	---	6.6% (1)
Providing reading material	20.8% (5)	33.3% (3)	20.0% (3)
Providing native speaker contacts	4.1% (1)	---	13.3% (2)
Help with technical German	4.1% (1)	11.1% (1)	40.0% (6)

the *BBC German Kit* only satisfactory (see Table 15 and commentary). These three students never developed a pattern of regular language laboratory work but used the counselling service to help them find learning resources that corresponded to their developing needs.

Table 19 summarizes the difficulties that participants reported having encountered in the course of their learning. More than half of Group B but only a quarter of Group A reported that they had encountered no difficulties. No doubt this helps to explain why fewer members of Group B reported difficulties in maintaining an adequate level of motivation and finding time to learn. Two of the three members of Group Ai who reported that they had encountered no problems were beginners. Throughout the two years of the programme they attended the language laboratory regularly and seemed satisfied to learn with the *BBC German Kit* at their own pace; they rarely came for counselling. The member of Group Ai who reported difficulties with the language (German grammar) came for counselling at an early stage. He showed a high level of commitment to learning German throughout the programme and was the only beginner to offer an optional area of interest for assessment. The three members of Group Ai who reported that they had difficulties motivating themselves are the same three who had taken German at Leaving Certificate, found the *Kit* only satisfactory (Table 15), and found self-instructional learning unsatisfactory (Table 18). It is perhaps to be expected that continuing learners will have more difficulty than beginners in motivating themselves to learn a language self-instructionally, especially when their previous learning has been class-based.

As Table 20 shows, by no means all participants

in the programme specified areas in which the counselling service could help them. Of the five students in Group A who expressed an interest in using the counselling service to help them find appropriate reading materials in German, two actively pursued this interest; they were both members of Group Ai. Although 6 members of Group B said they thought the counselling service could be of use in helping them to develop reading skills in technical German, only one of them subsequently followed this up. By contrast, all the members of Group Ai who specified an area in which the counselling service might help them subsequently sought help in this area.

By focussing at various points on characteristics of sub-groups and individuals within our three main groups of participants, the commentary on Tables 12-20 begins to suggest that group profiles can provide only limited illumination. For this reason, and because the thrust of our programme was towards individualization and autonomy, after the second interviews we made no further attempt to elicit information about groups of participants. Instead we concentrated on individual learners who presented themselves for counselling, and they provide the basis for the next section of this report.

3 COUNSELLING

3.1 The approach to counselling

As we explained in 1.3 above, we intended our counselling service to provide learners with both therapeutic and pedagogic support. In general we followed the model described by Harding and Tealby (1981a), which was developed specifically for second language learners. Other published material we consulted on counselling was concerned with the therapeutic process. However, many of the concepts and definitions associated with therapeutic counselling are manifestly appropriate to counselling for learning. For example, Hahn and McLean (1955) define counselling as "a one-to-one relationship between an individual troubled by problems with which he cannot cope alone, and a professional worker whose training and experience have qualified him to help others reach solutions to various types of personal difficulties" (cit. Pietrofesa et al. 1978, p.4). According to this view, a major element in counselling is the counsellor's expertise, which enables him to assist "in decision-making, in expanding his client's range of alternatives or options open to him, in modifying his behavior patterns in desired directions" (Wrenn 1970; cit. Pietrofesa et al. 1978, p.5). Counselling is a mutual enterprise involving both counsellor and counsellee and is based on respect for the individual and his ability, with the professional expertise of the counsellor providing the means whereby the counsellee gains a clearer understanding of his attitudes and problems and decides on appropriate action for their resolution. Pietrofesa et al. (1978, p.6) see counselling as "a relationship between a professionally trained, competent counselor and an individual seeking help in gaining greater self-

understanding and improved decision-making and behaviour-change skills for problem resolution and/or developmental growth".

Harding and Tealby (1981a, p.31) view counselling as a dynamic process involving four operations:

- Elicitation of needs. This involves the recognition and definition of the learner's problems. The counsellor's task is to help the learner to analyse his attitudes and problems and to formulate them so that the learner can take decisions on possible solutions.

- Interpretation of needs. This involves the negotiation of various alternative learning strategies and discussion of the implications of newly defined needs for the learning process. For example, a counsellor might discuss with a learner who wished to read semi-technical articles how to organize lists of specialized vocabulary in order to make them more easily memorable, or how to devise strategies to improve reading for general meaning on the basis of his specialized knowledge of the topic in question and the help afforded by figures, diagrams and tables.

- Response (decision as to what action should be taken). This involves decisions to refine or change aspects of the learning process in order to accommodate newly defined needs and interpretations. Examples of such decisions might be that the learner should increase his opportunities to listen to his target language by doing more work in the language laboratory, or that the learner should meet a native speaker of his target language on a

regular basis.

- Evaluation. This is an integral part of the counselling process since it necessarily precedes the definition and interpretation of new needs. Without self-evaluation the learner cannot be said to have achieved autonomy.

3.2 Techniques of counselling and data collection

When we introduced our programme we expected that only a handful of participants would have any previous experience of self-instructional language learning. As we have seen (Table 6, 2.2 above) only one member of Group A and two members of Group B reported that they had previously learned German self-instructionally. All other participants in the programme who had learned the language previously had done so as members of a class. We thus expected that learners might have some difficulty in coming to terms with the idea of counselling, despite our efforts at the introductory meeting and first interviews to explain clearly what was intended. Second interviews showed that even after three months of learning most participants regarded the counselling service as a last resort, to be turned to only when the learner could progress no further on his own. They perceived the counsellor as a last-ditch teacher who might be able to help hopeless cases by teaching them various aspects of German grammar and explaining areas of difficulty. Because of this perception participants were often shy about coming for counselling and sometimes apologized that their problems or requests were not sufficiently important to merit a counselling session. It was clear that the majority of them were not sure what to expect from a counselling

session and uncertain of the correct behaviour to adopt towards the counsellor. Many found it difficult to talk about their learning process openly, perhaps for the very good reason that they had no previous experience of doing so. After second interviews we renamed the counselling service the student advisory service. There is no evidence that participants found this change significantly reassuring.

Clearly the counsellor's first task in counselling was to create an atmosphere in which learners felt at ease. With some learners it was possible to develop a good working relationship in a relatively short time and discussion of their needs could begin almost at once. With other learners it was necessary to spend some time chatting about general topics of interest (Engineering studies, hobbies, holidays). Often details which emerged from these casual conversations proved a useful guide to learners' needs and provided a starting-point for subsequent sessions. The counsellor normally allowed learners up to ten minutes in which to introduce the topic of their language learning. If they had not done so after this time she would attempt to bring it into the conversation casually, perhaps by talking about her own attempts to learn Italian by self-instruction.

At the beginning of the programme we decided that the counsellor should take no notes during counselling sessions. There were two reasons for this. First, we felt that note-taking could create a barrier between counsellor and learner, especially when many learners were likely to be easily intimidated by the counselling process. Secondly, we believed that immediate note-taking could actually impede the counselling process by encouraging the counsellor to arrive too quickly

at a formulation of learners' needs and problems and an appropriate response to them. Instead of taking notes during counselling sessions, the counsellor wrote a brief evaluation of the session immediately after it ended and followed Harding and Tealby (1981a) in using key words to summarize the structure and content of the session. Cumulatively this technique proved to be appropriate to the dual demands of counselling individual learners over a period of time and compiling a systematic collection of research data. The technique was greatly assisted by the counsellor's practice of (i) negotiating with learners the meaning of the terms that they used to refer to their learning process, needs and problems, and (ii) concluding each counselling session with a systematic summary of what had been discussed and what action she and the learner had agreed the latter should take.

The different stages of our counselling practice can best be illustrated by a detailed case study taken from the first year of the programme. The learner in question was a beginner who had been working with the *BBC German Kit* for about two months; the counselling session was his first. Immediately after the session the counsellor made the following notes:

> Pace. He seems to believe he has found a suitable pace for learning. But is it as satisfactory as he thinks in view of his later comments about the *Kit*? Check this.
>
> Wants to be "able to speak German" – feels need to be able to generate language and feels that he needs to learn grammar "from a grammar book". (Need for security of basic grammatical structures.) Needs to define learning objectives in more specific way.

Discuss this next time.

Attitude to *Kit*: enjoys working with it but says he finds it limiting. Not able to transfer structures etc. from *Kit*. Does he really understand communicative value of *Kit*? Check success of learning activities by providing check list of communicative activities he can perform based on communicative range of first six units of *Kit*. This will provide a measure of what he has learned.

Need for supplementary reading material. Finds *Magazin* uninteresting and wants "something more historical or topical" yet "simple" so that he can get the general meaning without difficulty. Preference for written material - responded negatively to suggestion that he should use video material. Hesitant about pronouncing name of German town - does he need more practice in speaking German? Suggestion: meet native speaker - might also help him to understand communicative potential of *Kit*.

On the basis of these notes the counsellor then wrote the following case study:

Case study A

He seemed fairly relaxed at the beginning of the session. We chatted about his Engineering course for a while before moving on to his experiences with the *BBC German Kit*. He began by saying that he was getting along quite well with the course and that he had finally found a pace at which he could learn well. In view of the problems which he

later mentioned, perhaps his pace is not as suitable as he believes it to be. I did not ask him any further questions about this as he seemed keen to talk about what was troubling him. However, I hope to pursue this in our next session.

He wanted advice on choosing a grammar book which would set out the forms of the language simply. Once these basic structures are clarified and understood he believes he will be able to generate language - in his own words, "I'll be able to speak the language". At first he didn't seem clear about the sort of grammar book he wanted - "not an old boring one but something interesting - like the Reader's Digest perhaps, but with a bit of grammar as well". I asked several questions in an attempt to bring us both to a clearer understanding of his problems but was careful not to push him towards any particular definition. I would mention a particular problem, let him talk about it for as long as he wished, and if I felt that it needed to be dealt with in greater detail, I would come back to it as often as necessary. This "recycling" technique proved successful. He mentioned that he intends to work in Germany this summer and that this motivates him strongly to learn the language. Having discussed his request for a grammar to enable him to speak German for communicative purposes, I tried to redefine his problem in terms of his need to function competently in communicative situations and in this context spoke about the communicative value of the *Kit*. He was responsive throughout the discussion, at the end of which he repeated his request for advice on the choice of a German grammar but now formulated it in terms

of a reference grammar which he could use in conjunction with the *Kit*.

He stated that he had tried reading some texts in German but had failed to get even the general sense of them "because of the grammar". He could not recognize structures which he had already come across in the *Kit* (is this evidence that his pace had been too fast?) and so believes that the *Kit* is limiting and only provides him with stock phrases. He finds the content of the course book fairly interesting and relevant to his needs, but he does not find the topics in the *Magazin* of any particular interest, although he did say that he had not worked very much with the *Magazin*. He wants "something more historical or topical". I suggested that before our next session he might look at some video material on historical and topical subjects available in the language laboratory. He was not enthusiastic about doing this - he seems to be more confident about dealing with written texts than with spoken German. He may have problems with the pronunciation of German as he was not willing to try saying the name of the German town where he hopes to work this summer.

He does not really understand the orientation or communicative potential of the *Kit*. He seeks the security of a grammar book which will help him to understand the forms of the language and thus, he believes, to generate language. He finds the *Kit* limiting and wants to go beyond it by practising grammar exercises and reading German. If he could be encouraged to realize the communicative value of the course to his long-term aim of communicating through German

and his immediate goal of generating German, he might come to realize that his needs are best defined in terms of the activity of speaking German and listening to and understanding spoken German. I intend therefore to advise him on the availability and nature of the resources he requires but also to discuss with him in more detail the communicative orientation of the *Kit* at the next counselling session.

For our next session I intend to

- provide him with a list of reference grammars that are available either in CLCS or the College library, and advice on the nature and contents of each;

- provide him with articles from the German and English versions of *Scala* so that he can use the English versions to help him understand the German;

- suggest that he should write up a list of what he can do in German now that he has completed six units of the *Kit*;

- suggest again that he might look at some video material to give himself additional practice in listening to and understanding German;

- suggest that he should consider meeting a native speaker (if the latter were briefed to help him perform tasks in German that he is already familiar with, this might boost his confidence in his ability to communicate in German and his appreciation of the communicative bias of the *Kit*);

3.3 The experience of counselling

During the first year of the programme eight members of Group A made a total of twenty visits to the counsellor. Seven of these students had attended both first and second interviews; the eighth had begun working with the *BBC German Kit* without first contacting the counsellor, but at the time of second interviews turned to her for advice on supplementary learning materials. All but one of these students had learned German previously; five of them were members of Group Ai. The majority of counselling visits in the first year of the programme took place in Hilary term (in Trinity term participation in the programme declined as students prepared for their annual exams in Engineering).

In the second year of the programme thirteen members of Group A made a total of 48 visits to the counsellor. Six of these thirteen students had attended for counselling in the first year of the scheme. Three of them had not attended for counselling in the first year of the programme but had attended the language laboratory regularly; they visited the counsellor in Michaelmas term of the second year to discuss their learning programmes in relation to the assessment at the end of the year. They were satisfied both with the *BBC German Kit* and with their learning progress but sought reassurance that the pattern of learning they had developed would prepare them adequately for assessment. Once this reassurance had been given they sought no further help from the counsellor. By far the greatest use of the counselling service in the second year was made by members of Group Ai, and it is on them that we concentrate here.

Case study A presented in 3.2 shows how

tightly the therapeutic and pedagogic strands of counselling can be woven together. The learner in question sought assistance with learning materials and in doing so revealed learning problems of which he was almost certainly unaware. This was a particularly common occurrence early in the programme, when the majority of learners who came to the counsellor expressed their needs in terms of learning resources. They tended to believe that whatever problems they were experiencing could be solved if only they could gain access to the "right" learning materials. It rarely seemed to occur to them that their problems might derive from their needs, their attitude, their learning style, or some other personal factor. However, as the programme progressed it was our experience that individual learners came to require either predominantly therapeutic or predominantly pedagogic counselling. In other words, some learners had continuing problems in defining their needs, maintaining interest and motivation, finding an appropriate pattern of learning, and so on; while others developed a satisfactory learning process and used the counselling service as a source of supplementary learning materials and a means of monitoring their progress (this was especially the case with students who were working with authentic materials which lacked exercises and in-built procedures for self-evaluation). These two tendencies in our counselling experience can be illustrated by two further case studies.

Case study B

During the second term of the programme one participant who had taken German at Leaving Certificate visited the counsellor in order to express doubts about both the suitability

of the *BBC German Kit* to his needs and his own ability to adapt to self-instructional learning. He appeared to be on the point of abandoning the programme. The chief source of his difficulties seemed to be irrational beliefs about both his own ability and the language learning process. Although he expressed great enthusiasm for language learning, he confessed that he had found it a boring process at school, where he had not been a particularly successful language learner. He believed that he was good at picking up languages in a natural setting, but doubted his capacity to organize a self-instructional learning programme and develop a pattern of regular learning. It became clear to the counsellor that he was setting himself unrealistic goals and became despondent when he failed to attain them with a minimum of effort.

The negative image that this participant had formed of himself as a language learner constantly impeded his attempts to learn. He used evaluative adjectives like "wrong" and "hopeless" to describe his learning experiences and the language he produced. In discussion with the counsellor it emerged that these labels derived from the criteria which had been used in his German classroom to evaluate pupils' linguistic performance. He performed "badly" in his (or his former teacher's) terms if he failed to produce a complete sentence in response to a question, even though in most cases a native speaker would respond with no more than a word or two. During his first counselling session he admitted that he found the oral/aural dimension of the *BBC German Kit* off-putting as his previous learning experience

had been almost exclusively focussed on written forms of the language. From the beginning of the programme he found that he had considerable problems with the pronunciation of German, and he attempted to overcome this by constantly repeating and memorizing phrases and sentences from the early units of the *Kit*. Thus he spent a lot of time and energy learning by heart material which was already familiar to him and which was far too simple to be of enduring interest. At school, learning by heart had proved an effective means of obtaining satisfactory marks, but in the context of self-instructional learning it produced boredom and a sense of failure.

The counsellor attempted to help this participant to clarify his attitudes and needs by analysing his image of himself as a language learner and his beliefs about the language learning process. She deliberately used his labels and expressions in order to gain access to the way in which he perceived his learning, and constantly encouraged him to reformulate and clarify his statements in order that she could be sure she understood what he meant. During the earlier counselling sessions she referred to the amount of time and energy he was evidently willing to expend on learning German as an indication of the motivational resources at his command. She discussed the general structure of the *BBC German Kit* with him and outlined various strategies for working with it. She also suggested various alternatives to language laboratory work, but the participant had already recognized some of the communicative potential of the *Kit*. He felt that if only he could achieve a

satisfactory pattern of learning, the *Kit* would enable him to attain his goal of being able to communicate through German - he wanted to work in Germany when he had completed his Engineering studies.

In order to show this participant that the task was not as hopeless as he often supposed, the counsellor prepared a unit of the *Kit* with him, discussing its objectives and linguistic content. She then asked him to list all the difficulties he encountered when working through the unit. Greatly to the participant's surprise it turned out that his difficulties focussed mainly on pronunciation and relatively minor grammatical details. The counsellor encouraged him to proceed by setting himself attainable short-term objectives and to make as much use as possible of the "Check Your Progress" units in the *Kit*. She also helped him to design checklists by which to measure his progress. Gradually his confidence in his language learning ability and thus his image of himself as a language learner improved, and he began to develop a learning pace suited to his particular needs and style. But he needed the constant reassurance that the counsellor was available to provide support and offer advice on his learning. He sometimes reverted to his old technique of learning by heart anything that he could not grasp fully, and this led to despondency, which in turn made him abandon his learning for a week or two. He would then use the counsellor to help him re-establish a learning routine. In the second year of his learning he decided after some hesitation to attend a native speaker meeting. To his surprise he found not only that he could

understand much of what was said, but that he could actually make himself understood in German. This was a valuable source of motivation. Also in the second year of his learning he developed an interest in technical German. He tried to work with texts provided by the counsellor, but eventually decided to concentrate his efforts on completing the *Kit* and preparing himself for compulsory assessment. It is certain that without the support of the counsellor he would not have completed the two-year programme.

Case study C

An extreme contrast with the participant whose counselling experience we have just summarized is provided by the one member of Group A (and Group Ai) who had already learned some German by self-instruction. This learner did not come for first interview as he intended to use CLCS's resources without participating in the programme for students of Engineering. However, by about the middle of Hilary term in the first year of the programme he had worked through the *Kit* and he then turned to the counsellor for advice on follow-up learning materials. From the first he impressed the counsellor as a very capable and efficient learner who was well able to direct and organize his own learning. No doubt his previous experience of self-instructional learning had helped him to achieve the autonomy he already possessed.

Initially this participant asked the counsellor simply for information on the learning materials that were available in

CLCS. However, having discussed with her the design and purpose of the programme for Engineering students and the nature of the counselling service, he decided that his own learning objectives might best be achieved within the framework of the programme. His primary aim in learning German was for purposes of everyday communication; yet because he was a shy person he found it difficult to establish contacts with native speakers or other learners in order to practise his German. At first he was hesitant about attending native speaker meetings, but eventually he participated actively and benefitted greatly from them.

By the middle of the first year this participant had decided that he wanted to specialize in the reading of technical texts in German. After experimenting with various resources, he decided to concentrate on *NTF - Teil 1: Werkstoffkunde* (Buhlmann and Fearns 1979), a well-structured self-instructional course. At the same time he was pursuing an interest in various aspects of German literature and exploring techniques for processing complex literary texts. However, in the second year of the programme he concentrated exclusively on *NTF* and developed a regular pattern of work and counselling. He would prepare a unit of the course over a period of two or three weeks, then come and discuss his work with the counsellor. The technical knowledge that he derived from his Engineering studies enabled him to use the charts and diagrams in the book as a means of gaining access to the German text. However, as the text was often highly complex he encountered linguistic difficulties and turned to the counsellor for

help with them. Since the counsellor had no technical expertise, she could rarely resolve the learner's difficulties without further ado. Instead, she and the learner had to approach the meaning of the text collaboratively from their respective positions of linguistic and technical expertise. This procedure worked very successfully and was not notably impeded by the learner's insistence that as far as possible counselling sessions should be conducted through the medium of German. It was particularly valuable in helping to deepen the counsellor's perception of her role, bringing her to a realization that at certain stages in the counselling process it was possible for the learner rather than the counsellor to assume the role of expert.

Our experience of counselling during the two years of the programme confirmed that therapeutic counselling is essential for some learners if they are to complete their course of learning; but it also taught us that learners who quickly achieve autonomy are likely to seek counselling of a largely pedagogic character. The two kinds of counselling demanded considerable flexibility on the part of the counsellor. It should be noted that the most successful learner to take the programme was the one participant who had previously learned some German by self-instruction; whereas the two learners who required the most intensive therapeutic counselling had both taken German at Leaving Certificate and evinced problems that derived at least partly from the pedagogical style of their former German teachers.

3.4 Native speaker meetings

As we explained in 1.3 above, besides counselling individual learners, the counsellor had a support role vis à vis the group of learners as a whole. This expressed itself most significantly in the planning and organization of meetings between learners and native speakers of German. In planning our programme we assumed that in order to maintain a sufficient level of motivation the self-instructional learner must have regular evidence that his learning is effective. The self-evaluation units in the *BBC German Kit* went some way towards meeting this need. However, in the second term of the programme learners began to express the need to meet native speakers of German in order (i) to hear German spoken spontaneously and (ii) to have an opportunity to use the German they had learned.

When participants in the programme first asked us to organize some meetings with native speakers they rejected any notion that the native speakers should teach them, however informally. For Hilary and Trinity terms 1982-3 the counsellor recruited two German students, both men, who were spending a year at Trinity College; for 1983-4 she recruited two German language assistants, both women. In either case she explained in detail the nature of the programme and the purpose that meetings with native speakers was intended to serve. Meetings were planned for two levels of learner, beginners and intermediate. In preparation for the meetings native speakers familiarized themselves with the functional range of the opening units of the *Kit* so that they would be able to contrive conversational situations in which learners could use the German they had learned.

In 1982-3 there were six native speaker meetings

at either level; feedback from both native speakers and learners was enthusiastically positive. Before the first meetings learners had been anxious to establish that they could use English if it became absolutely necessary. The native speakers were themselves fluent speakers of English, but in order to maintain their non-dominant role they developed the technique of asking the learners for help whenever the conversation switched to English. The native speakers reported that they needed to speak very little English during the early meetings but that they played the most active roles in conversations. However, gradually learners took a more active part, and by the end of the year the native speakers reported that they no longer had to use any English in the meetings since learners who had formerly experienced comprehension difficulties had developed strategies to check meaning and ask the native speaker for a repetition if necessary.

After their second native speaker meeting intermediate learners decided that in future they would like to have a particular topic for discussion and suggested that they might read a newspaper or magazine article before the meeting as a basis for discussion. Native speakers and learners agreed on a topic and the counsellor provided them with copies of an article she considered appropriate. After a few meetings with the beginners' group the native speakers reported that they had exhausted the topics of conversation that were within the learners' range and suggested that they should devise role-play activities and language games based on the range and content of the *BBC German Kit*. These activities were successful in helping learners to lose their inhibitions and gain confidence in speaking German.

In 1983–4 further native speaker meetings were organized along these lines for Group A and meetings were also arranged for Group B. The intermediate level meetings for Group B proceeded successfully, but after the first beginners' meeting learners reported considerable difficulties and said they would prefer to do some preliminary oral work with the counsellor before attempting another native speaker meeting. It is difficult to say why this happened, though it may have been due in part to the smallness of the group. The counsellor organized a number of sessions at which she used role play and language games similar to those she had devised with the native speakers in the first year of the programme. These sessions were an unqualified success, and towards the end of 1983–4 two native speaker meetings took place which according to both native speakers and learners were successful.

4 ASSESSMENT

As we have seen, the students participating in the programme fell into two categories: beginners and those who already knew some German. We thus decided to offer assessment at two levels, which we described as beginners' and intermediate. Because the *BBC German Kit* had been the basic learning resource for the programme, we further decided that compulsory assessment should be based on the communicative range (though not necessarily limited to the linguistic content) of Units 1–15 of the *Kit* for the beginners' level and of Units 1–25 (the whole *Kit*) for the intermediate level. At each level the instruments of compulsory assessment were an oral test lasting 10–15 minutes and a pencil-and-paper test lasting an hour and a half. It was for each student to decide the level at which he should be assessed. Participants in the programme also had the option of requesting assessment on any skills they had developed in German in addition to what would be tested in the compulsory assessment. This optional assessment involved a second pencil-and-paper test lasting an hour.

The oral component of compulsory assessment at both levels consisted of four simulations, in two of which the candidate responded to an enquiry and in two of which he had to initiate the exchange. At beginners' level the response to another's enquiry involved giving directions based on a map, street plan, etc. and giving information from a railway, bus or plane timetable; at intermediate level the range was increased to include giving information about what is on in the cinema, theatre, etc. and giving information about oneself. At beginners' level the candidate had to take the initiative in two of the following transactions: shopping for food; doing business

in the post office; ordering a meal in a restaurant; asking for information at the railway station; booking a room in a hotel; booking train or theatre tickets in advance. At intermediate level this list was extended to include: shopping for clothes; making an appointment with the doctor or dentist; asking for help in finding something you have lost. For each transaction we prepared an outline script which determined the goal of the transaction and the simplest path by which it could be attained. Immediately before he was tested each candidate was given ten minutes to study his four outlines together with appropriate documents (e.g. maps, timetables, the entertainments page of a German newspaper). The test was conducted by two examiners, one of whom interacted with the student while the other listened. The criteria for evaluating each transaction were (i) did the candidate perform the transaction successfully? and (ii) if so, how many and what kind of difficulties did he encounter. We distinguished three grades of pass: A (very good), B (good) and C (adequate). We automatically gave a fail mark for any transaction which broke down before the candidate had achieved the goal of the transaction. Recordings were made of all candidates so that we could subsequently check our on-the-spot evaluations; in no case did we find it necessary to revise our marks.

For the pencil-and-paper component of compulsory assessment at each level we devised a test containing twelve questions which sought to be interactive in a variety of ways. Half the questions emphasized comprehension (for example, requiring candidates to fill in a grid summarizing the main facilities offered by three different hotels), and half required some form of production (for example, filling in the missing half of a transaction). At both levels half the questions

were based on authentic or semi-authentic audio recordings. For this reason the test was administered in the language laboratory. Each candidate was given a cassette containing the six audio recordings and was free to use it in whatever way he liked. In evaluating candidates' performances we used the same two basic criteria and the same grading system as for the oral test. Since the pencil-and-paper test was strongly biased towards oral communication, we did not penalize candidates for spelling mistakes provided that their orthography was phonologically approximate.

Of the nine learners presenting themselves for assessment at the end of the 1982-4 programme, five opted to be assessed at beginners' level and four opted to be assessed at intermediate level. With one exception their choice of assessment level reflected whether or not they had known any German at the beginning of the programme: one student who had learned German previously chose to be assessed as a beginner. All nine learners passed the compulsory assessment, one beginner by the skin of his teeth. The grades awarded at beginners' level were: A-, B+, B-, C+, C-; and at intermediate level: A, B+, B-, C.

Five learners requested additional assessment in areas of special interest. One beginner asked to be assessed on his comprehension of simple magazine articles of the kind found in *Scala Jugendmagazin*; he performed this activity very well and was given A-. One beginner and two intermediate learners asked to be assessed on their comprehension of semi-technical journalism of the kind found in *Die Umschau* and *Bild der Wissenschaft*; they performed adequately and were given the grades C+, C and C- respectively. Finally, one intermediate learner (the subject of case study C in 3.3 above) asked to be assessed on

the comprehension and manipulation of technical texts in German; he performed at a level that would put many honours students of German to shame and was awarded grade A.

5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion we want to make three brief points.

First, we are encouraged that as many as nine participants survived to the end of the first cycle of the programme and performed at least adequately in the terminal assessment (their sense that they were likely to perform adequately was probably an important factor determining their survival).

Secondly, there is no doubt that our programme responded to the individual needs, interests, levels and learning styles of the participants in a way that would not be possible in a class-based course. This reinforces our belief that appropriately supported self-instruction is the best way for many adults to learn the foreign languages they need.

Thirdly, our experience of counselling suggests that even with a small group of learners a counselling structure needs to cover a wide range of therapeutic and pedagogic functions. But our experience also shows that, given appropriate learning materials, some learners (most of our beginners, who did not venture beyond the *BBC German Kit*) are able to achieve functional competence in a foreign language with scarcely any support at all.

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APPENDIX:
QUESTIONNAIRES USED AT FIRST AND SECOND INTERVIEWS

FIRST INTERVIEW

Name of student: _____

1. What is your mother tongue?

English/other

2. Which languages have you learned?

French/German/Italian/Spanish/Irish/

other

3. Where did you learn these languages?

school/country/elsewhere

4. Which methods were used?

traditional/audio visual

written/oral

mechanical/creative

5. Which methods did you like/dislike?

T / AV / W / O / M / C

6. Which methods did you find successful/unsuccessful?

SECOND INTERVIEW

Name of student: _____

Standard of German at beginning of programme: _____

1. How often did you visit the language laboratory?

2. How much private study did you do (if any)?

3. How much progress have you made?

4. What do you think of the BBC German Kit?

5. What are your aims in learning German at this stage?

6. Do you need any practical help in any area of the course?

7. How did you find learning a language in a self-instructional way?

8. Did you encounter any particular problems in the course of your learning?

9. If so, could the Student Advisory Service be of use to you in dealing with these problems in the future?

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